

Looky, looky, I've got Hooky

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

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Cor blimey gov'nor. Peter Pan - the boy who never grows up - is all grown up. In stark contrast, I'm back to rake over the coals of a 27-year-old game I played when I was a kid. How ironic. And also appropriate that Peter Banning (not Pan) now works as a cutthroat corporate lawyer, or as granny Wendy puts it, he's become a pirate, despite spending his once-assumed-to-be eternal childhood *fighting* the scurvy rogues.

Produced eighty years after J.M. Barrie's novel, 'Peter and Wendy', in Steven Spielberg's 1991 sequel we catch up with an adult Peter - played by the late Robin Williams - who has not only done the unthinkable by evolving into a boring, soulless, workaholic adult, but also spawned two of those little people commonly known as children. Ugh!

He's not so keen on them either as it happens. Peter is so busy wheeling and dealing, winding down companies and

picking over the bones that he almost forgets they exist. He misses critical, coming-of-age moments in their lives, and even when he's there he's somewhere else, courtesy of the magic of early cellular phone technology, which must have appeared practically space-aged at the time.



As if to punish him for his wilful neglect, Peter is visited by his old nemesis, Dustin Hoffman, also known as Captain James Hook, or simply 'Hook' because it fits better on the movie poster. For reasons that aren't explained he is able to warp between dimensions, bursting out of Neverland and into modern-day London, unseen under a cloud of green fog. Before you can consult movie-nitpickers.com to register your protest, 12-year-old Jack and his 7-year-old sister, Maggie, have been kidnapped and whisked off to the land of giant ticking crocodiles and flying fairies.



Without Peter with whom to verbally and physically joust, Hook has grown despondent with his now empty, war-free life, so much so he contemplates committing harakiri.

All of which explains why he's left behind a rather novel calling card - a ransom note pinned to the children's bedroom door with a dagger to lure Peter back to his old stomping ground for the ultimate - and terminal - tete-a-tete.



Not just a pantomime villain as can be seen from Hook's slaughter of Rufio, this is a distinct possibility. Retroactive spoiler alert: Rufio - the leader of The Lost Boys - isn't sword-proof and people die even in Neverland.





This poses a bit of a dilemma for Wendy who is forced to explain to Peter that he was once the legendary Pan of folklore fame before falling in love with his wife, Moira, caused him to suffer amnesia. Not to worry, Pretty Woman

Julia Roberts flutters in through the open window scene of the crime on cue, armed with a cunning plan.



Dressed as the saccharine sweet Tinkerbell, she transports her unrequited old flame back to his forgotten past to settle a long overdue score and rescue his kiddywinkles.





Tinkerbell's dialogue was written by Carrie Fisher, trivia fans. Along with George Lucas she makes a weeny cameo appearance as one-half of a couple of lovers who are conferred the ability to fly by a sprinkle of stray pixie dust.

Once in Neverland, Peter must first learn the covert art of blending in, becoming a kind of costume shop pirate overnight, whereas Guybrush was made to jump through a dozen hoops to earn his stripes. Now looking the part sporting his stolen attire, Peter is able to inveigle his way onto Hook's ship to deliver a jolly good finger-wagging, and hopefully prise his offspring free from the clutches of the dreaded 'Codfish' believed to be Blackbeard's former bosun.



His plan soon hits a snag in that Hook won't release them without an all-out war with Peter Pan, and he doesn't believe the pudgy, middle-aged lawyer standing before him is the genuine article.



Unfathomably Codfish's right hook man, Smee, somehow manages to produce Peter's medical and dental records to prove otherwise, and Tinkerbell takes the opportunity to negotiate a deal; grant Peter three days to get in shape and she'll return with a worthy challenger, a flying swashbuckler clad in lycra to keep him amused, reinvigorating his passion for wanton sadism.



To achieve this he must reacquaint himself with The Lost Boys and convince them of his true identity. With their help, Peter sheds the excess pounds and learns to re-engage his lost imagination and mastery of fencing.



Against the odds - and gaping plot holes - Peter rediscovers his happy place (being a daddy) allowing him to soar aloft into the blue yonder without the aid of a propeller or parachute.



OH HOIRA, MY WIFE.



TINK! I'VE FOUND MY HAPPY
THOUGHTS! MY FAMILY!!

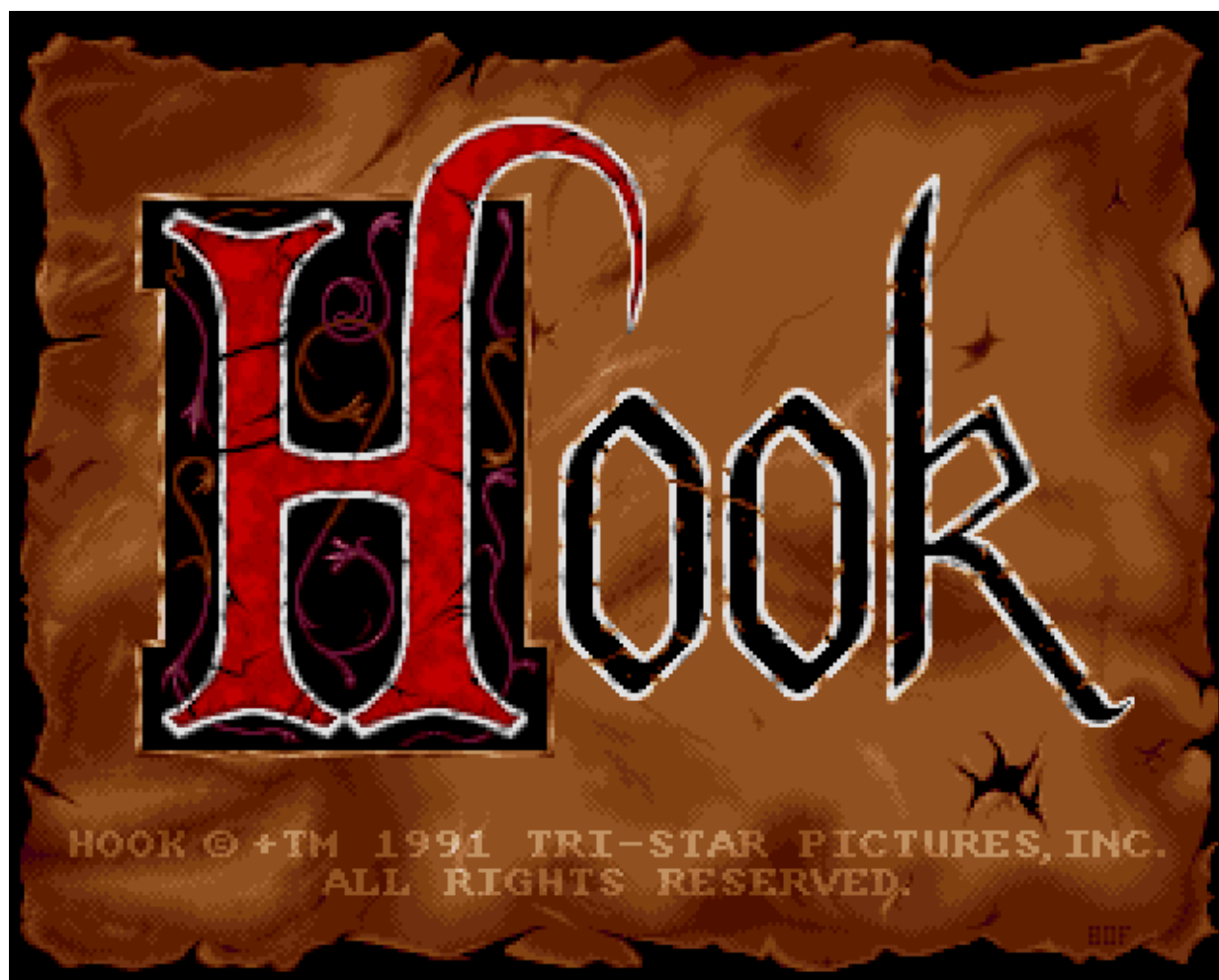


Becoming Superman is so overwhelming Peter forgets why he's here and has to be reminded by Tinkerbell. As promised he presents his new and improved self to Hook for inspection and an epic battle ensues. One we're kidded into thinking

has climaxed and then unexpectedly recapitulates several times to extend what is already a flabby, overwrought movie, before Hook is finally eaten by an inanimate, stuffed crocodile. No, really. His worst nightmare keels over on top of him, mouth agape, swallowing the astonished future-LeChuck whole. Hook disappears without a trace saving Peter the trouble of running a steely blade through his guts, shimmying around the possibility of sabotaging the movie's family-friendly PG rating.



With programmer Bobby Earl at the helm, development of Ocean's licensed tie-in game commenced in January 1992, the month after the movie was released to theatres in the US. With the movie's roll out to the UK scheduled for April, Ocean aimed to unveil their point and click adventure game to coincide. However, their ambitious deadline projection proved too tight, what with simultaneously overseeing the development of a platformer revolving around the same license for the C64, Game Boy and NES produced by Painting by Numbers.



Ultimately the Amiga, PC and Atari ST title was released in July 1992 as we geared up to enjoy the movie in VHS rental format. Whilst not a massive hit, according to The One magazine, it entered the Gallop sales charts in September 1992 at number 16, remained there through October at number 22, before climbing back up to number 14 in November. Conversely, the movie raked in \$300.9 million at the box office, leaving a tidy profit after deducting the \$70 million budget.

Without a license to replicate the likenesses of the movie cast, Ocean were obliged to create their own more generic interpretations, as were Mattel, the manufacturers of the accompanying toy lines. It was especially crucial in this case

that they were recognisable as their Hollywood counterparts because Hook and Peter are on display permanently in the GUI to indicate when your quest is progressing according to plan. Whenever you achieve a milestone Hook grimaces, his moustache twitches (as in the movie when he subliminally hears the unnerving sound of a ticking clock), and he shakes his Hook with a growl. Peter, in contrast, simply smiles subtly and pleasantly as you'd expect from his mild-mannered silver screen persona. Correspondingly, other characters are seen in close-up cut scenes so the accuracy of their representation was equally important if the game was to be convincing to fans of the film.



Otherwise, the adventure game follows the movie's premise fairly closely, minus the drawn-out build-up to Peter being hauled off to Neverland to reconnect with his inner child. After all, who would want to role-play Peter's morality vacuum legal occupation? It would be like introducing a trade tax plot device to a sci-fi extravaganza like Star Wars. It would never happen.

Once on the island, Peter must acquire sufficient funds to tide him over by selling his gold teeth to a dodgy dentist.



Then begins the task of furnishing his new pirate wardrobe, learning to insult creatively, fight, fly, and finally earn a rendezvous with Captain Hook.





Certain liberties were taken to flesh out the limited sound-stage sets seen in the movie, and additional unidentifiable characters were introduced. This is most evident in the tavern area where a sub-task involves gathering several mugs to allow us to ply a pirate with cocoa (a substitute for Monkey Island's grog, this being a Disneyfied affair), in order to send him into a sugar coma, allowing us to steal his pants for camouflage.



Most divergent of all is the way Hook meets his maker. In the game, Peter engages in a battle of wits and insults as in Monkey Island's sword-fighting sequences, controlled entirely through staggered dialogue exchange. Successfully pitched verbal abuse results in Hook taking a step back, and vice versa. Our goal is to nudge him an inch at a time towards the ship's plank walkway, and finally tip him over the edge to his salty, watery doom. Unlike the movie, there is only a single stand-off and no crocodiles are involved. Spielberg could have learned a useful lesson from Ocean there. All things considered, he's actually not especially fond of Hook despite being the linchpin possessing the power to shape its production.

Conversation is your mainstay for advancing the plot as you'd expect in a point and click adventure. This is executed by cycling through dialogue responses using the right mouse button, then selecting the desired choice with the left button.



You'll spot that some lines are lifted directly from the movie. I'm in two minds as to whether that's a good idea or not. Is that lazy scripting or an authentic celebration of the source material? Maybe I'm just not used to games so closely following the plot of the movie on which they're based. 'Loosely inspired by...' is a phrase games critics must have had logged in the computer equivalent of speed-dial back in the eighties and nineties. We have that now, it's called Text-Expander. Clever stuff.

Talking to yourself as well as others isn't such a bad idea. Cowardly Peter's first instinct is usually to hide under a rock until any danger has passed, so it's well worth repeatedly prompting him to perform actions he's previously refused to concede. He'll get with the program eventually.



It's also possible to pick Tinkerbell's tiny brain for advice if you get stuck, unless you rely on her too much, then she gets peeved and won't come out to play. If it looks like you're coasting she'll throw a wobbler and tell you to work it out for yourself; you're presumably the exalted, ever-resourceful Peter Pan after all.



During the early work in progress stages it was the intention for all characters to communicate via digitised audio throughout. Nevertheless, that would have demanded Hook be made available only for CD drive owners, excluding the vast majority of Amiga gamers. In reality, the only sprites to enunciate their lines are a rabble of pirates who momentarily chant the name of their esteemed leader. It's a long way shy of full-on 'talkie' titles such as Day of the Tentacle and Sam and Max, which would be released only a year later, albeit for the PC where CD technology was more commonplace.

Adventure games live and die by their level of attention to detail, and there's clear evidence to show that Ocean went the extra mile with Hook. For instance, there are the neat

touches of background nuance that bring the scenery to life. You'll notice an Oscar for Peter Pan on a shelf in the pub, and there's the animated scurrying ants and fluttering birds in Never Forest. In the foreground, worthy of note is our cutlass shaped mouse cursor, and Peter's phone-twiddling idle animation (entirely fitting since he's obsessed with it in the movie).



That said, in terms of precision detail, there isn't nearly enough of it; some backdrops and people remain static at all times, and there are few unique locations to explore. In general, it's an extremely short game that can be completed in just over half an hour if you know what you're doing. On a positive note, this makes Hook an ideal candidate for introducing newcomers to the genre - it's easily accessible, implementing a user-friendly control system that effortlessly becomes second nature with minimal time invested.

In spite of any misgivings, Hook is a fun and immersive adventure, based on an interesting IP with plenty of scope for small screen translation. Forgoing for a moment the movie's cringey sentimentality, Hook was a spectacle to behold back in 1991 in a similar way that Superman wowed audiences growing up in the late seventies. Even Robin Williams is watchable, this not being one of his excruciatingly zany

comedies or stand-up routines. As a serious actor he was among the best of his generation, truly deserving of the recognition and awards he earned. Evoking the magnitude of the movie in any minor way was bound to work in the game's favour, winning over kids not previously interested in computer games. For those already invested, bolting on a popular blockbuster license would serve to endear them to what was below the surface quite an average point and click adventure escapade. It's the licensed game equivalent of beer goggles.



Jonathan Dunn's musical accompaniment is unassumingly impressive in a low-key sort of way, what little there is of it. Regrettably much of the time the game is completely silent, save for the odd incidental background sound effect invoking

lapping waves or the whistling of the wind, for instance. What this demonstrates is that John Williams - composer of the movie's soundtrack - is a tough act to follow *whoever* you are.

Where Hook deviates most significantly from its apparent inspiration - Monkey Island - is in the depth and humour of the script. Brevity is the keyword and one-liners minimal. That said, you can't help grin when Peter claims to be able to hear the sound of the Ocean when standing inside a giant seashell... on the seabed many leagues beneath the waves, surrounded by mermaids. Are there any other zingers that *aren't* references to Monkey Island?





A lack of laughs isn't in effect a major drawback seeing as the movie is no comedy riot showcase for anyone over say, ten years old. However, some of the exchanges are exceedingly limited, repetitive and may even occur out of sequence in some cases. A baffling and disjointed hurdle to leap for anyone not familiar with the story. Bugs aside, returning to the target audience of the movie, when you consider that the game too was aimed at a younger crowd, many of its supposed flaws pale into insignificance. A step further, they strike me as reasonable compromises.

Comparison to Monkey Island is inevitable given that the games share the same genre, milieu, core theme, and superficially, the number of disks they occupy (four that is). There's even a conspicuous joke to be found in Hook that refers to becoming a "mighty pirate", confirming that the similarity - homage even - hadn't gone unnoticed by the developers. Making Hook HD installable as initially planned would have also put it on a level pegging with Monkey Island, only that didn't come to fruition, possibly for anti-piracy reasons.



Hook was, in fact, an acid test case for novel protection routines. Aside from Rob Northern's usual disk check, it contains several lines of code that modify the way the game operates if it cannot be confirmed that you are running it from original floppy disks. More specifically, one of the three mugs you are required to collect goes missing in action if the second disk check fails, the upshot being that the game can't be completed. Check out the interview Codetapper conducted with Hook coder and designer, Bobby Earl, to read the full story.



Sadly Hook was always going to be the poor relation, living in the shadow of its older, groundbreaking forerunner. In fact,

any game would be setting itself up for a dramatic fall by even attempting to compete, so you have to give Ocean credit for taking on the masters at a time when Monkey Island II had just been released, and the first game was already available as a budget title... if you can class £16.99 as a budget price that is.

Monkey Island has the absurdly witty banter, expansive, engrossing plot, complex puzzles and epic ambience. Hook by virtue, despite exhibiting some luscious cartoony graphics courtesy of Kevin Oxland, Martin McDonald, Jack Wikely, Dawn Drake, and Don McDermott, ends up looking a bit flat and empty without your movie-triggered imagination to prop it up.



We know how the story concludes and how Peter gets from A to B so filling in the blanks was never going to be rocket science. Accordingly, the gameplay is linear and the puzzles elementary, leaving many people - not entirely sold on the film - feeling like they're sitting in a bedroom on their lonesome, manipulating a computer mouse, pretending to be a flying boy who never grows up.

